**Christopher Eyre**

**Calculated Frightfulness and the Display of Violence**

Modern readings of Egyptian royal (self-)presentation – both depictions and text – tend to focus on ideological and higher level symbolic issues over low-level practical behaviour.[[1]](#footnote-1) An address to the reality behind both ancient and modern idealisation and abstraction asks for a different and more literal reading of the material, for which consideration of the actual violence inherent in (political) hierarchy and social order provides one useful thread of argument. Yoyotte, in his classic enquiry into human sacrifice in Egypt,[[2]](#footnote-2) makes the point very clearly: that we should not be hypnotised by a modernising vision of civilised ancient Egyptians. It is unlikely that the nice ancient Egyptians subscribed to the curious view of the post-colonial West, that one invades foreign countries for their own good, and that armies should do their best not to kill anybody: that the purpose of empire is to civilise.

There has always been an implicit contrast with neo-Assyrian royal self-presentation, as frightful by calculation:[[3]](#footnote-3) the display and narration of mass cruelty to rebels, particularly as a feature of the decoration of the royal palace. At its simplest, the underlying theme is that he who submits to Assyrian domination will be spared, but that resistance or rebellion will be treated ferociously, through the public display of calculated frightfulness – decapitation, impaling, flaying, mutilation – and its detailed reproduction in relief and royal narrative. The underlying theme is a universal cliché: that a city which rebels or resists can expect to be sacked, the males killed and women and children enslaved. The deliberate savagery has both strategic and ideological purpose, but it also represents the extreme assertion of power.[[4]](#footnote-4) In practice one can doubt that the nationality of a marauding army made a lot of difference when an ancient town was sacked. The focus on this sort of detail – including impact on civilian populations – belongs to an approach, self-characterised as the writing a ‘new military history’, which has not been broadly used in Egyptology,[[5]](#footnote-5) partly because of the nature of the Egyptian record. So, for instance, the balance in warfare between ethics and expediency is not discussed explicitly in Egyptian sources,[[6]](#footnote-6) nor the impact on the conquered, but anybody who opposed the Egyptian king, in any way, was by definition sbi, and could expect extreme violence.

Egyptian royal narrative, and particularly relief, has always seemed more restrained in what is displayed. Egyptian presentation of the king slaughtering enemies seems visually ordered and stereotyped. Violence is depicted as marginal, limited in individuation, and so not appearing quite real, in contrast to comparable Assyrian material: the Egyptian king standing on prisoners which decorating the floor of his throne-base or the soles of his sandals.

Even the motif of the Egyptian king standing on prisoners is stylised and ordered – picturing world control – as they make a floor for his throne, dias, or the soles of his sandals, or even in the picture of Ramesses III standing on an ordered platform of prisoners to shoot arrows at the chaotic and disordered enemy fleet.[[7]](#footnote-7) Trampling over disordered heaps of distorted corpses becomes a cliché for the chaos of the battle-field, but standing on live prisoners seems a stylistic representation. This stylisation is, however, rooted in the plagiaristic use of battle reliefs, from one reign to another, as ideological – and fictional – presentations of the role of the king. Even where incidental detail in the relief seems to preserve specific events, these can themselves be plagiarised historical events, serving to assert performance of a role.[[8]](#footnote-8) It is never simple to distinguish between the symbolic depiction of violence, as something characterising a broader reality, and the incidental and specific example of violence.

**Punitive expeditions and slave-raiding**

One should take at face value what the Egyptian texts say. For instance, the Elephantine Inscription dated to the first year of Tuthmosis II:[[9]](#footnote-9)

st Hm=f m aH=f bAw=f sxm snd=f xt tA

Now His Majesty is in his palace, (while) his divine intervention and the power of fear of him are through the land;

SfSt=f m idbw HAw-nbw psSty Hr st-Hr=f

dread of him is in the banks of the islands, and the two-divisions are under his authority;

pDt 9 dmD Xr tbty=f

the 9 bows are collected under his feet.

The world paid tribute to him. But Nubia rebelled:

iw.tw r rdit wDA ib n Hm=f r ntt kS Xsit wAi.ti r bSt

One came to inform His Majesty that “Vile Kush has taken to rebellion.

wnw m nDt nt nb-tAwy xmt nkAit

Those who had been clients of the Lord of the Two Lands have planned a conspiracy,

sbit(yw) wAi r Hwtf rmTt kmt

(and) the opponents taken to plundering the people of Egypt,[[10]](#footnote-10)

r hnp mnmnt Hr-sA nn mnnw qdn it=k m nxt=f nsw-bity aAxpr-kA-ra anx Dt

to driving off the herds behind these forts which your father built by his might, King of Upper and Lower Egypt Aa-kheper-ka-Re, living for ever,

r xsf xAswt bStt iwny sty nw xnt-Hn-nfr.

to control the rebellious lands of the tribesmen of Nubia of Khente-hen-nefer.

The king was not happy:

xa(r).in Hm=f r=s mi Abi m-xt sDm=f st

Then His Majesty raged like a panther after he heard it.

Dd.in Hm=f anx=i mri (w)i Ra Hsi (wi) it=i nb nTrw imn nb nswt tAwy

Then His Majesty said. “(As) I live, and Re loves me, and my father Amon, Lord of the Thrones of the Two Lands favours me,

n<n>(?) di=i A anx m TAy=sn wAH=i A mwt(?) im=sn

I shall not allow to live (any) among their males; I shall put death among them!”

aHa.n ssbi.n Hm=f mSa aSA

Then His Majesty sent a large army.

The result:

aHa.n mSa pn n Hm=f spr r kS Xsit bAw Hm=f sSm.n=f st nx.n Sat=f nmtt=sn

Then this army of His Majesty reached vile Kush; the divine-intervention of His Majesty, it guided them; his slaughtering (or ‘terror of him’) protected their steps.

wn.in mSa pn n Hm=f Hr (s)xrt nn xAstyw

Then this army of His Majesty were felling these desert-people;

n di=sn A anx m TAy=sn mi wDt.n nbt Hm=f

they did indeed not allow (any) to live from their males, entirely as His Majesty had commanded,

wpw-Hr wa m nn msw nw wr n kS Xsit

apart from one from these children of the chief of vile Kush,

inw m sqr-anx Hna Xrw=sn r bw Xr Hm=f

brought as prisoner of war, with their (sic) dependents, to where His Majesty was,

diw Xr rdwy n nTr nfr sT Hm=f Hr TnTAt

put under the feet of the Good God, while His Majesty was on his dais,

xft sTA sqrw-anx ini.n mSa pn n Hm=f

when the prisoners which this army of His Majesty had brought were dragged (forward).

iriw xAst tn m nDt nt Hm=f mi sp=s imi-HAt

This land had been made (or ‘was acting as’) client of His Majesty like its former time.

rxty Hr hy hnw mnfyt Hr rS di=sn iAw n nb tAwy

The (Egyptian) populace were joyfully praising, and the troops rejoicing, as they gave praise to the Lord of the Two Lands;

swAS=sn nTr pn mnx m spw nw nTr=f

as they exalted this beneficial god with the examples of his god-ness.

Foreign war has two core purposes: profit, or the removal of nuisance. The treatment of prisoners will depend largely on the balance of advantage in that respect.[[11]](#footnote-11) A punitive expedition involves killing and destroying as widely as possible, ‘to make a desert and call it peace’.[[12]](#footnote-12) The ancient Egyptian regime was not able effectively to manage an extensive imperial regime abroad, nor was large-scale chattel-slavery a feature of the Egyptian economy. The establishment of a level of military occupation – like the Nubian forts – implies sufficient control to exploit local resources. In practice, however, the normal alternatives for the victor were mass killing and plunder, taking whatever of the population could be physically controlled, for resettlement: a sort of slave-raiding for economic development.[[13]](#footnote-13) The core method of dealing with foreigners is then, in all cases, presented as raw violence: nxt. The close reading of specific Egyptian texts provides some insight into contemporary behaviour and purpose. For instance, the Gebel Barkal stela of Tuthmosis III, describing a campaign against Naharin and its ruler:[[14]](#footnote-14)

xbA.n=i niwt=f wHyt=f

I hacked-up its towns and its clans.

di.n=i xt im =sn

I set fire to them.

iri.n st Hm=i m iAt nn xpr grg st

My Majesty made them as mounds, whose (re-)settlement will not happen.

HAq.n=i rmTt=sn nbt

I carried away all their people,

iny m sqr-anx

brought as prisoners of war

mnmnt iry nn Drw xt=sn m mitt

and their herds without end, their (moveable-)property as well.

nHm.n=i anxtt r=s

I seized what one lives on.

wHA.n=i it=sn

I cut their grain.

Sa.n=i mnw=sn nb xt=sn nb bnr

I cut down all their woods, all their fruit trees.

ww=sn wn=sn n dnf(SIC)

Their districts were for the knife(?).

Sksk.n sw Hm=f

My Majesty destroyed it,

sw xpr m ☒☒☒☒ tkAH nty nn wn Snw Hr=f

it having become like a burnt place (?), without trees on it.

The text can be read as formulaic, repeating themes first projected in the depiction of towns being hacked down on the Early Dynastic Battlefield palette,[[15]](#footnote-15) through the 6th Dynasty claims of Weni to have hacked up (bA) and devastated the land of the Sand-dwellers,[[16]](#footnote-16) and Pepinakhte to have hacked up (bA) lower Nubia.[[17]](#footnote-17) The themes of massacre, plunder of people and animals, the burning of settlements, and the destruction of crops and trees are regular, at all periods. An inscription of the vizier Antefiker/Gem,[[18]](#footnote-18) probably from year 29 of Amenemhet I, claims:

wn.t(w) Hr qd xnrt pn aHa.n smA nHsw spt nbt m wAwAt aHa.n=i xnti.kw m nxt Hr smA nHs Hr idb=f xd.n(=i) Hr fdt it Hr swA spw nhwt=s dy xt m pr=sn mi irt r sbi Hr nsw

This stronghold was being built. Then the Nubians – all the rest in Wawat – were slaughtered. Then I sailed upstream in might, slaughtering the Nubian on his bank, and (I) sailed downstream, pulling up the grain and cutting the rest of their trees, and fire was set to their houses, as is done against one who sbi against the king.

A difficult passage in the Tod inscription of Sesostris I emphasises the capture of all rebels, burning and decapitation, and: [[19]](#footnote-19)

nmt m msw xryw imnyt m aAmw(?),

butchery with (the) children of the enemies, the slaughtered-animals consisting of Asiatics.

The Semna Stela of Sesostris III includes the repeated theme of the pursuit of fugitives to the hills:[[20]](#footnote-20)

HAq.n=i Hmwt=sn ini.n=i Xrw=sn pr r Xnmwt=sn Hwi kAw=sn wHA it=sn rdi xt im

I plundered their women and I brought (away) their families who had gone out to their wells; their cattle were driven off, their grain cut, and fire set there.

The Semna Stela of Amenhotep III specifically times the campaign, led by the Viceroy of Nubia, to the enemy harvest. The list of captives (HAq) – men, women and children – ends with:[[21]](#footnote-21)

dmD tp anx 740 Drt iry 312 smA tp anx m 1052

Total: head, living, 740. Hands thereof, 312. Slaughtered(?) and head (of) living, as 1052.

As a contrast, the Stela of Piye asserts: [[22]](#footnote-22)

n smA.tw wa nb im wpw sbiw waA Hr nTr iri.t(w) nmt m XAk-ibw

No one was exterminated there except the opponents who had blasphemed against god; butchery was done with the disaffected.

Piye is asserting an absence of violence in areas he overran: the actions of the conqueror and not a punitive expedition.

**The theatre of power: mutilation and impalement**

The underlying theme of the devastation and depopulation of neighbours who pose a threat, combined in effect with slave raiding on a large scale to populate Egypt, are normal, comprehensible, and better documented than Egyptian attempts to impose effective political occupations. In reality it is not the vocabulary of the Egyptian accounts, or the underlying actions, which are different, but levels of detail.[[23]](#footnote-23) What is uncommon in the Egyptian material is the individuated description of specific acts of violence. The most striking example comes in the Amada stela of Merenptah, picking up much the same themes as the Elephantine text of Tuthmosis II:[[24]](#footnote-24)

xpr.n rnpt 4 Abd 2 Smw sw 1 xft(?) ii(?).n pA mSa qni n Hm=f sxr pA wr Xsi n rbw n sp wAH=st rmT nb n rbw [.….] nb m tA=sn [….] m Hfnw Dbaw nA spy diw Hr-tp-xt Hr rsy Mn-nfr

(It) happened (in) Year 4, month 2 of Harvest, day 1, when(?) the active army of His Majesty returned(?) (from) felling the vile chief of Libu, they did not leave any people of Libu, […..] any .. in their land […] in hundreds and tens of thousands; the rest were put on stakes to the south of Memphis;

xf.t(w) xt nb ini r kmt SA-r-mA wrw r-Dr nA n tAw psx n bAw Hm=f hmhmt=f m ib=sn [..].n=f st i.iri=n r tnw pA mAi Hs Hr hb=f pA hAhA n r=f n WAwAy xf st m sp n(n) iwaw tA=st ini r kmt ma..(?)

Everything was plundered, and brought to Egypt; the chiefs in their entirety did obeisance; the lands were scattered at the at divine-intervention of His Majesty, his war-cry in their hearts. He has [..] them. “Where can we go? The fierce lion is prowling(?); the flame of his mouth is against the land of Wawat, They are destroyed at one go. There is no heir (to) their land, being brought to Egypt ..(?) .

xAa ht r nAy=sn aAy m bAH iry=st tA spy Sad Drt=w Hr nAy=sn btA ktxw nHm anxwy r(?) irwy iTA r kS st irw m aHaw m nAy=st niwt n sp wHm kS bSd r nHH

Their great have been set fire to in front of their subordinates; the rest had their hands cut off over their crime, (or) others their ears and eyes taken away, (and) being taken to Kush they were made in heaps in their towns. Kush did not rebel again for ever.

The mistreatment, massacre and display are localised to the site of the battle, but also transferred to the capital for the different audience. A display of the massacred on a forest of stakes south of Memphis is probably already attested from the reign of Akhenaten, when an inscription from Buhen distinguishes numbers of defeated Nubians as ‘those living’ (tp anx) and ‘those on (a) stick’ (nty Hr xt).[[25]](#footnote-25) The theme is repeated in the later execution of rebels at the coronation of Ptolemy V at Memphis:[[26]](#footnote-26)

tj=f smA=w st (n) pA xt

He had them slaughtered (on) the stake (Demotic).

smA m rdit tp-xt

slaughtered by putting on a stake (Hieroglyphic).

The impalement of criminals is referred to directly in the Ramesside Period:

twice in the Nauri Decree of Sety I as a penalty for malfeasance related to the temple property and income:[[27]](#footnote-27)

iri.tw hp r=f m sxr=f diw Hr tp xt Hna m(?)TA Hmt=f Xrdw=f xt=f nb r tA Hwt

The law shall be done to him, by felling him, being put on a stake, together with taking his wife and his children and all his property to the Temple.

Similarly, in a protection decree of Sety I from Hermopolis:[[28]](#footnote-28)

Xr ir Hm-nTr nb wab nb n Hwt-nTr n niwt nty iw=f r Sd xt nb rmT nb iri.tw hp r=f m sxr=f diw Hr tp xt r-gs tA Hwt nty iw=f r iTit xt nb rmT nb im=s

And as for any priest, any *wab*-priest of the temple of a(?) town, who will exact any property or any person, the law shall be done to him, by felling him, being put on a stake beside the temple from which he will take any property or any person.

A summary of the fates of the thieves in Papyrus Mayer A begins with:[[29]](#footnote-29)

nA n iTAw i.dy Hr tp xt Xr-HAt s 7

The thieves who were put on a stake previously, 7 men.

Such impalement is a repeated theme in the oath formulae of the Tomb Robbery papyri, as those interrogated swear to the truth of their testimony:[[30]](#footnote-30)

di.tw n=f anx n nb a.w.s. r-Dd mtw=i Dd aDA iw=f xSb di.tw(=i) tp xt

He was administered a oath of the Lord, l.p.h., saying, “and I shall lie, he is mutilated, (and I) shall be put on a stake.”

Or with more detail:[[31]](#footnote-31)

iry=f anx n nb a.w.s. r qnqn=f <…> fnd=f[[32]](#footnote-32) msDry=f di<.tw>=i(sic) Hr tp xt

He took an oath of the Lord, l.p.h, to flog him, <to mutilate> his nose and his ears, (and) I will be put on a stake.

This includes the case of a woman Isis, interrogated about property her husband stole, who is required to swear:[[33]](#footnote-33)

mtw=s Dd aDA iw[=s] xSb dd.tw tp-xr

“and she shall lie, she is mutilated and put on the stake.”

Slightly earlier, in relation to the inspection of a tomb in Year 21 of Ramesses III, the oath is taken:[[34]](#footnote-34)

[…] wAH pA hqA a.w.s [pA nty bin pA]y=f bAw r mwt

“[…] (and) by the Ruler, l.p.h., [the one who]se divine intervention is [worse] than death,

mtw=i [wn tA aHa an] iw=f xSb Sri=f msDr=f diw Hr dpx m pAy dm rn n pr-aA a.w.s. im iw=f Hr wHm Dd=f an

and I shall [open the tomb again], he is mutilated – his nose and his ears – and put on the stake, by this pronouncing[[35]](#footnote-35) the name of Pharaoh, l.p.h., over (it),” and he repeated his statement again.

The emphasis of the oath lies on blasphemy against god and the king as the context for the physical retribution: the legal oath as an invocation of divine or royal intervention, turning what was a personal or civil case for mediation into, potentially, a direct attack on the king.

The purpose of impalement is display, whether or not it is the actual method of execution:[[36]](#footnote-36) to be seen both as warning and demonstration of power. The implication of the oath formulae is that impaling would be preceded by torture and mutilation. The lesser version of the oath, characteristic of the late Ramesside documents from Thebes, refers simply to mutilation and dispatch to Kush:[[37]](#footnote-37)

r-Dd mtw=f Dd aDA iw=f xSb dd.tw (r) kS

saying, “and he shall lie, (then) he shall be mutilated and sent to Kush.”

The physical penalties of flogging and mutilation decreed by Nauri Decree are parallel to those of the oaths:[[38]](#footnote-38)

iri.tw hp r=f m Hwt=f m sx 200 wbn sd 5

The law shall be done to him by beating him with 200 strokes and 5 open wounds

Or:[[39]](#footnote-39)

iri.tw hp r=f m xSb(?) fnd(?)=f[[40]](#footnote-40) msdry=f diw r aHwty m tA Hwt

The law shall be done to him by mutilating his nose and his ears, he being put to be a peasant in the Temple.

Public mutilation displays punishment while heavy financial penalties provide restoration. The public display of extreme violence and cruelty is general in pre-modern law, providing the primary (physical) assertion of (royal) power and so authority.[[41]](#footnote-41) Specific reference to actual mutilations are rare in Egyptian sources – the relevant types of legal documentary text are too rare – but isolated examples exist. One passage in the records about the Harem Conspiracy against Ramesses III inclues a list of:[[42]](#footnote-42)

rmT iry n=w sbAyt m sA fnd=w msDr=w Hr pA xAa i.iri=w nA mtr nfr Dd n=w …. iw pAy=w btA iTA=w

Persons to whom punishment was done, by cutting off their noses and ears, because they had abandoned the good instructions given them …. And their sin took them.

References to the punishment of Ramesside tomb robbers is similarly clear:[[43]](#footnote-43)

iw=i Dd n=f iw=w (r) Xdb(?)=k Hr pAy TAw i.iri=k [m] pA xr

I said to him, “You will be put to death over this theft you carried out in the tomb.”

Or an officer of the army, who denies all complicity in the thieving of his subordinates:[[44]](#footnote-44)

inn iw.tw (r) Hdb=(i) Hr rmT ntf tAy=i TAwt

If they will kill me over (my) people, that is my thieving!

Or another victim of interrogation, asserting:[[45]](#footnote-45)

ptr(=i) tA sbAyt i.iri n nA iTAw r hAw TAty xai-mwAst yA ix pAy-i Sm r wxA pA mwt iw=i rx sw

I saw the punishment done to the thieves in the time of the vizier Khaemwaset. What would I be going to seek the (same) death, when I know (what) it is!

A set of accusations of malfeasance against a *wab*-priest at Elephantine includes:[[46]](#footnote-46)

sxA r pA Sad i.iri pAy wab msDr n sxA.tw-m-nfr sA bAk-stt m-xmt pr-aA a.w.s.

Memorandum concerning the cutting-off this *wab*-priest did of the ear of Sekhatuemnefer son of Bak-Satet without Pharaoh (knowing).

The early New Kingdom *Duties of the Vizier* refers to the vizier punishing a functionary who abuses one of his envoys on official mission by swA at ‘cutting off (a) limb’.[[47]](#footnote-47) His (and vicariously, royal) authority is not to be trifled with.

In other cases the threat of removal of a limb seems to put a sinner on a par with a sacrificial animal, and the reality of the action is less clear.[[48]](#footnote-48)

In practice such penalties are declared at a level that would necessarily prove disabling, and fatal in a significant number of cases. Their purpose is the assertion of hierarchical (royal) power, exercised by display of cruelty on the body of the victim, and not the idealising morality, which Diodorus attributes to removing the nose of an adulterous wife.[[49]](#footnote-49) Indeed, the Amada stela of Merenptah seems to present the severance of hands, eyes and ears as in effect modes of execution, with the mutilated bodies heaped up as warning.

**Slaughter by the king**

Violence – the public murder of captives as a sort of theatre – is described incidentally in New Kingdom examples. The account given by Amenhotep II of his execution of 7 princes of Tikhsy, and their display as corpses:[[50]](#footnote-50)

ii.n Hm=f m Awt-ib n it=f Imn

His Majesty returned in joy to his father Amon,

smA.n=f pA wr 7 m HD=f Ds=f wnw m w n tixsy

when he had slaughtered the 7 chiefs with his own mace, (those) who had been in the district of Tikhsy,

diw m sxd m HAt bik n Hm=f

they being put upside down at the prow of the barque of His Majesty,

nty rn=f m-Dd aA-xprw-ra-smn-tAwy

the name of which is Aa-kheperu-Re-preserves-the-Two-Lands.

wn.in.tw Hr axt pA s 6 m nn n xrw m xft-Hr sbty n WAst nA n Drt r mitt

Then the 6 from these fallen-ones were hung in front of the fortification of Thebes, and the hands as well.

aHa.n sxnt pA ky xrw r tA sty

Then the other fallen-one was sent south to Ta-Sety,

axw n pA sbty n npt

and hung on the fortification of Napata

r rdit mA.tw nxtw Hm=f r nHH Hna Dt m tAw nb nw tA nHsy

to cause that the might of His Majesty be seen for ever and ever in all the lands of the Land of Nubia.

The same theme is presented by Ahmose son of Abana, describing the return from a Syrian campaign of Tuthmosis I:[[51]](#footnote-51)

nait m xd in Hm=f xAswt nbt m Ammt=f

Travelling south by His Majesty, all lands in his grasp,

iwnty-sty pf Xsi m sxd m HAt bik n Hm=f

that vile Asiatic Bedouin upside down in the prow of the bark of His Majesty.

diw r tA m ipt-swt

Land was reached at Karnak.

In contrast, a block from Karnak, probably of the reign of Tutankhamun, displays a live captive, caged and hanging from the royal boat, probably from mast rather than prow.[[52]](#footnote-52) The humiliation and mistreatment of foreign prisoners, brought before the king for display in Egypt is not described in the same incidental detail as examples where Esarhaddon and Assubanipal had conquered kings fitted with leashes through their faces,[[53]](#footnote-53) and kept for display in dog-kennels at gates in Nineveh,[[54]](#footnote-54) but the underlying motif is the same.

Mistreatment of prisoners is normal, and a repeated theme. The prisoner (of war) is sqr-anx, ‘struck (but) alive’: typically shown bound, in ways that are not merely restraint, but physically damaging.[[55]](#footnote-55) The hieroglyphic determinative depicting a prosioner shows his arms bound tightly behind, where pictures show a greater range of painful positions, including arms twisted behind the head, and sometimes using of wooden yokes to handcuff.[[56]](#footnote-56) The balance between the execution of prisoners, their death from mistreatment, and resettlement of survivors cannot be clear. The branding of captives with the royal name is referred to in the Great Harris Papyrus of Ramesses III, for those settled as immigrant populations, and such branding is depicted in one scene of his from Medinet Habu.[[57]](#footnote-57) Women and children as captives are not shown under restraint, but driven like cattle, and their chance of survival of transportation was significantly higher.

Depictions of prisoners are, then, displays of physical mistreatment that emphasise the exercise of raw power and physical humiliation. For instance, Amenhotep II displayed a prisoner on his chariot:[[58]](#footnote-58)

gmi.n=f wpwty n pA wr n nhrn Xr Sat sinw r xx=f

He found a messenger of the prince of Naharin, carrying his dispatch, sealed (??) at his throat

ini.n=f sw m sqr-anx Hr nDrw n wrrt=f

and he brought him as prisoner-of-was, on the nDrw of his chariot.

The purpose of display is clear:[[59]](#footnote-59)

ini.n=f mryn anx 16 Hr Drwy n wrrt=f

He brought 16 *maryannu* at the rear of his chariot

Drt 20 r dhnt n ssmt=f

(and) 20 hands at the heads(?) of his horses.

He deals with a large number of prisoners personally:[[60]](#footnote-60)

m-xt mA.n Hm=f pA HAq aSA wrt

after His Majesty saw the very numerous plunder,

iw.tw Hr iri(t) st m sqr-anx

they being made as prisoners-of-war,

iw.tw Hr irit Sdy 2 m-qd=sn nb

and a pair of ditches being made around them all,

mk mH st m xt

and it being filled with fire,

iw Hm=f m rsw Hr=s r HD-tA

and His Majesty as watch over it until dawn,

iw pAy=f jqHw Hr wnmy=f

with his iqHw weapon at his right (side),

wa nn wa Hna=f

alone, without (a single) one with him,

ist pA mSa wAi r=f Hrw sDmw-aS n pr-aA

while the army was away from him at a distance – the attendants of Pharaoh!

It is not clear here, whether the king is presiding over the incineration of a large number of prisoners, or standing watch over prisoners corralled inside a ditch, full of fires to control them. The image is reminiscent of the wild-cattle scarab of Amenhotep III:[[61]](#footnote-61)

isT wD.n Hm=f rdi.t(w?) itH.tw nn smAw(?) m sbty Hna Sdy

Now His Majesty ordered that these cattle be corralled in an enclosure with a ditch.

The king then took a break for 4 days before continuing the slaughter. As in the Amada stela of Merenptah, and the inscription of Osorkon, the question of whether the reference is to burning of prisoners alive, or the corpses of the dead, is unanswerable on the basis of the texts presented.

The overlap between display of frightfulness against foreigners or criminals is seamless, as in the Chronicle of Prince Osorkon.[[62]](#footnote-62) Following his suppression of Theban opposition, the local population came acclaiming him and asking him to restore order to the temple of Karnak: executions, and appointments of people to office follow, in a display of ritualised savagery:

aHa.n D[d].i[n] [mr] Sma is(?) ini n=i tht=f nb a nw tpyw-a […] irt ra aHa.n ini.tw=sn n=f Hr-[a] m sqr-anx mi Htrw nw D[nHw aHa].n sx[r=]f n=f st rdit ms=[sn] mi arw grH xt-[x]Aw rkH aw im [aHa.n … s]mA=sn mi axw nw prt-spdt rkH.tw s nb me sDt m st btA=f […] wAst

Then the [Overseer] of Upper Egypt sa[id], “Go, bring to me every transgression against him, document(s) of the ancestors […..] Eye of Re. Then they were brought to him at once, as prisoners (sqr-anx), like those whose w[ings] are yoked. [Th]en he felled (sxr) them for him, causing [them] to be conducted like goats on the night of the [Even]ing Offerings, when braziers are ignited (rqH), […. s]laughter (smA) them, like braziers of the Going Out of Sothis, so that every man be ignited in flame in the place of his crime (btA=f) [….] Thebes.

The context is explicit:[[63]](#footnote-63)

Dr-nt(t) tA pn wAi (r) mHw hpw=f sbi Xr a [sbi]w r nb=sn m wn m srw=f Ssp [g]st nb m rw-pr=f r HD sxrw=f

since this land has fallen (into a state of) drowning, its laws (hpw) having perished (sbi) at the hand(s) of those who [oppo]sed ([sbi]w) their lord, being those who had been his officials (srw), and those who had received the palette in his temples, to destroy his plans.

The explicit concern lay with the destruction of the rituals and plunder of the temples.

A focus on the various rituals for destroying enemies – cosmic as well as human – can create the impression that such killing was, of itself, something aberrant, symbolic, and not real behaviour. This seems a reasonable conclusion in relation to the un-reality of human sacrifice in offering rituals,[[64]](#footnote-64) or cannibalism,[[65]](#footnote-65) which seem at most to be symbolic motifs in specific ritual contexts, and not a real feature of Egyptian ritual behaviour. In contrast, the motif of the king striking enemies on the head should not be treated as purely symbolic, but to carry direct reference to real behaviour.[[66]](#footnote-66) A difficult passage describing the Ramesses III’s treatment of the Libyan chief, after a peculiarly bloody description of battle, seems to make the point:[[67]](#footnote-67)

mH m kA-pw-rA ini smA mSa=f wn ib=sn hn Hr=f r Sd=w smA qbs awy =f dnH mi Apd pxd Hr bAry Xr nmt Hm=f iw=f mi mnTw nxt rdwy=f Hr tp=f nAy=f HAwtyw r HAt=f smA m xfa=f

Kupuro was seized on, and brought – his army, which had relied on him to save them was slaughtered - (and) slaughtered, his arms bound(?), pinioned like a bird, spread out on a floor(?) under the tread of His Majesty, he being like Montu, the might of his feet on his (Kupuro’s) head, and his chiefs were in front of him, slaughtered in his grasp.

Execration texts, and the relatively common prisoner statues of the Old Kingdom, may well emphasise the symbolic element, but the find at Mirgissa of what seems to be the human victim of an execration ritual emphasises the acting out of the theme:[[68]](#footnote-68) 4 interments of execration material, including the severed skull of a Nubian in the third of the deposits, accompanied by a flint knife and with a decapitated and disarticulated skeleton found nearby.

Here there are two potential contexts: the killing of enemies left on the battlefield, as in the case of the so-called ‘slain soldiers of Montuhotep II’.[[69]](#footnote-69)

This mass, and rather disordered burial of hastily prepared bodies – only 10 full skeletons, but including 59 skulls – clearly assembles a group of men killed in combat, and collected after lying in the open long enough for vultures to have begun scavenging: some killed immediately, but some whose range of wounds seem to indicate that they were clubbed to death on the battlefield. The same may possibly have been the case for the king Sekenenre Tao.[[70]](#footnote-70) The alternative is the ceremonial execution of enemies on public occasions, such as that described above in the inscription of Tuthmosis II.[[71]](#footnote-71)

**Mutilation**

An inscription of Sety I from Karnak expresses very directly his joy in killing:

Htp ib=f Hr mA snf Hsq=f DADAw n XAt <XA>kw-ib mrr=f At m titi r hrw n jhy smA st Hm=f m sp wa b(w) wAH=f iwayt im=sn sp Hr Drt=f m skr anx inw r tA mri

His heart is content at seeing the blood, when he severs the heads (from) the bodies of the disaffected; he loves the moment of trampling more than a day of celebration(?); His Majesty slaughters them all together; he does not leave an heir among them; he who remains *on his hand*(?) is a prisoner, brought to Egypt.

It is impossible to decide whether the reference here is to escape from the killing hand of Sety I, or to the retention of the hand as a statement of survival. The theme of collecting the hands of defeated enemies[[72]](#footnote-72) begins with the military autobiographies of the early 18th Dynasty – notably those of Ahmose son of Abana and of Amenemheb, who refer to them as a normal trophy, for display and evidence of activity. Its reality is attested archaeologically by finds at Tell el Daba,[[73]](#footnote-73) although relief depictions of heaps of hands collected after the battle are Ramesside. Decapitation is a consistent motif for the disabling of the dead in Egypt,[[74]](#footnote-74) but it is not a common motif in the pictorial display of massacre, althout is is seen already on the Narmer palette, where Davies and Friedman argue that the depictions of beheaded enemies show also the removed phallus on top of each head.[[75]](#footnote-75) Clear depictions of the harvesting of phalli from the enemy only appear in the Ramesside period, as visual display parallel to the heaping up of hands collected – and accounted – as trophies and display after battle. Textual references are few, but the record of his 1st Libyan War refers to the presentation of phalli, hands, and captives to Ramesses III at his Window of Appearances.[[76]](#footnote-76) The references to the practice seem to say that phalli were collected from un-circumcised Libyans, as alternative to the collection of hands from other groups, but the texts are incomplete, and the illustrations are not conclusive.[[77]](#footnote-77) In contrast, the association – textual and pictorial – between slaughter and cutting off hands is normal from the beginning of the New Kingdom.[[78]](#footnote-78) A description of Amenhotep III exemplifies:[[79]](#footnote-79)

sxm-ib sw Hr Dn sp 2 Hr smA Hr Sad Drt

he is firm-hearted in raging greatly, in slaughtering, in cutting off hands.

Earlier pictures are more individualised: the king with hands decorating his chariot,[[80]](#footnote-80) or individuals carrying hands as personal trophies,[[81]](#footnote-81) which were presented to the King’s Herald for record and reward. The depiction of scribes recording heaps of hands then becomes a theme in Ramesside battle scenes. The details of the narrative, and the few depictions of soldiers actually cutting off hands, do not make clear whether this was done only to the dead (or nearly dead), or whether hands might have been cut off to incapacitate unwanted prisoners:[[82]](#footnote-82) the contemporary weapon technology was insufficient for the clean severance of a limb from any but a completely incapacitated person. The removal of the hand simply provides one of the incidental details of violence in the battle scenes.

The apparent increase in the display of violence in the New Kingdom may simply be a reflection of the increase in scale of royal display on monuments, and the complexity of inscribed text. It does not necessarily reflect only the values of an increasingly militarised regime, or changes in the nature and scale of warfare, although a sense of deep insecurity seems to characterise the attempts to resist the mass migrations into Egypt between the reigns of Ramesses II and Ramesses III. The normal equilibrium between Egypt and its disordered margins is characteristic of many early state regimes: a settled agricultural core, dependent on uncontrolled margins as provider of resources, both material and human: requiring occasional pacification, but important as a locus for slave raiding focussed on the acquisition of subjects, for resettlement and economic development, and not for commoditised chattel slavery.[[83]](#footnote-83) Controlled immigration, as the result of campaigning, was profitable in providing necessary manpower to Egypt; and uncontrolled immigration was (at least ideologically) resisted. The Semna dispatches record Medjay questioned and turned back, although they explain their arrival because ‘the desert is starving’:[[84]](#footnote-84) the occasional depictions of famine on Old Kingdom monuments seem to represent Egyptian views of the reality of life outside the pale.

Merenptah’s narratives can only be described as presenting massacre as a calculated policy for dealing with mass migration, and rooting out migrants who had occupied significant areas of the Delta. In contrast, the Great Harris Papyrus of Ramesses III lays more emphasis on the settlement of invading tribes: claiming military victory, but settling them in their own communities, in the traditional way in which people deported to Egypt were used to increase the productive manpower of the country. In the end the only resolution for mass migration was massacre or absorption, and by the reign of Ramesses III one can only guess that the Western Delta was so de-populated that a mass absorption of Libyan tribes was a more profitable, if not the only practical course.[[85]](#footnote-85) The artistic elegance of the warfare reliefs of the period, with their depiction of the mass chaotic slaughter of invaders, should not, however, distract from the utter bloodiness of the warfare.

**Fear, power and authority**

The exercise of violence lies at the core of any display of royal authority, and the modes of violence are not differentiated in the treatment of foreigners or criminals.[[86]](#footnote-86) Any form of opposition to the king defines the offender as sbi: the dictionary translation of ‘rebel’ is culturally loaded. The Egyptian term covers everything from being a foreign opponent, through genuine rebellion, actions that disobey a royal edit, to simple royal disfavour. The consequence is much the same. The display of violence lies at the core of authority.[[87]](#footnote-87) In this sense the clichés of royal power are statements of reality, not genteel ideology. The bAw of the king is worse than death; his Sfyt, through the land, and terrifies because of the violence – his nxt - that accompanies it.[[88]](#footnote-88) Fear of him (snD=f) incapacitiates.

The royal presence is genuinely terrifying. People are ‘dragged’ (sTA) in, regardless of whether they are prisoners or simply introduced into regular royal audience. Immanent royal power is unpredictable, and the ideological relationship between the person of the king and violence against offenders is direct. There seems to have been an underlying taboo on direct use of the royal name in a range of problematic contexts, and the use of impersonalising and deflecting phraseology as ways of obviating the direct reference to the king’s personal involvement: most notably through the use of impersonal (passive) verbs – ‘one did’ – for his actions, and reference to the king as Pharaoh (pr-aA = ‘great-house’), or as Hm=f, ‘his slave’.[[89]](#footnote-89) In the group of texts which record the treatment of those involved in the Harem Conspiracy against Ramesses III, it is a repeated (and repeatedly commented) theme, that the fate of those convicted lay on their own heads, and not the on the king himself.[[90]](#footnote-90) The theme is comparable to that argued (on rather limited grounds) that in legal context the most severe physical penalties, of mutilation and execution, were a royal prerogative and required royal approval:[[91]](#footnote-91) ‘the old and humane law according to which Pharaoh alone had the right to authorize a criminal’s death or mutilation’.[[92]](#footnote-92)

The oath calls on god and king to flog, deface, and kill. While there is an underlying theme, that the ferocity of the oath serves as a call to raise the stakes in dispute, it is equally a repeated theme that the king is merciless, and his enemy has no tomb, characterised by both extreme violence and denial of burial.[[93]](#footnote-93) Of the two common Egyptian words, the term Xdb seems to be the unmarked word used for ‘kill’, where smA can better be translated by ‘slaughter’, used as the normal term for ‘(ritual) slaughter’ of animals, but then of the slaughter of enemies, ceremonially and outside the heat of battle, and then again perhaps as the loaded term for ‘murder’ against simple killing: a deliberate, pre-meditated and individual act. Frandsen has argued that this loaded meaning includes the Egyptian concept of a full killing: to the ‘second death’, involving utter destruction (including posterity).[[94]](#footnote-94) That approach is reinforced by reference to the slaughter-block (nmt) ‘as place of execution for the enemies of Pharaoh’.[[95]](#footnote-95) The point of torture, defacement and execution does not lie simply in punishment, and the modern image of bureaucratisation of process is anachronistic: the point lies in display, and the creation of fear. In military contexts the terror of the enemy is central to the argument. In civil contexts, violence is in practice the core assertion of authority, and the tool for removal of any sort of challenge to authority. The Instructions for Merkikare refer to the creator god destroying mankind when his authority is challenged, locating the threat of violence as the extreme tool of all social control:[[96]](#footnote-96)

smA.n=f xftyw=f HD.n=f msw=f Hr kAAt=sn m irit sbit

He has slaughtered his enemies, he has destroyed his children over what they plot in doing sbit.

Similarly of god:

smA.n=f XAkw-ib mm mi Hwi s sA=f Hr sn=f

He has killed the disaffected (there)among, like a man strikes his son over his brother.

The murder of captives should be understood as a regular, theatrical display of how authority should be feared, not a symbolic representation of cosmic order. Fear claims to prevent opposition – the consequences of sbi are dire – just as it should discourage crime. Fear is then an important theme in practical social order at all levels.[[97]](#footnote-97) The unpredictability of royal power is made fairly clearly in the Instruction for Merikare: [[98]](#footnote-98)

sAw.ti Hr xsf m nf

Avoid punishing pointlessly.

m sqr nn st Ax n=k

Do not strike – it is not useful to you.

And:[[99]](#footnote-99)

m smA wa tkn im=k Hsi.n=k sw

Do not slay one close to you, when you have favoured him.

There is, however, a more general expectation, articulated directly in the Instruction for Merikare, that violence is structural to society:[[100]](#footnote-100)

nn wn Sw m xrwy

There is nobody free from (having) enemies.

Society is only controllable by local fear and violence. For instance, the late 6th Dynasty autobiography of Merefnebef includes (lines 12-15) the warning against anybody who will do evil to his tomb, its cults and priest(hood):[[101]](#footnote-101)

iw(=i) r irit n=f pHwy Hr=s r gs=s[n?]

I shall make an end to him over it beside them(?)

dy n(=i) snD im=f r mAA

Fear is put in it for me, so that

tpy=sn tA snD=sn n Ax(=i??)

their heirs on earth shall see, and they shall fear (my??) *akh*,

mst(y)w=sn m tA pn r-Dr=f

those who will be born in this entire land.

Seeing the result is crucial, and violence as tool of both hierarchy and social order is the norm, and not the exception.

**Violence and the state**

In reality, any contact with (state) authority in Egypt carried an expectation of violence for the individual, where fear was the key tool. As the Installation of the Vizier says:[[102]](#footnote-102)

imi snD=k snD.t(w) n=k sr pw sr snDw mk Sfyt nt [sr] iri=f mAat mk ir di s snD=f HH n sp iw nkt im=f n aDA m rx n rmT n Dd=sn r=f s pw

Instill fear of you, so that you are feared; the official who is feared is the (real) official. Note (then) that awe of an official (lies in) him doing *maat*. (But) note that when a man causes himself to be feared a million times, there is something of wrong in him in public opinion; they do not say about him, “He is a man!”

The threat of violence, and its measured exercise, underlay hierarchy.[[103]](#footnote-103) Revenue collection is consistently associated, in picture and text, with the flogging of the farmers and responsible village headmen. Illustrations in Old and Middle Kingdom tombs show floggings of revenue payers, either tied to a post,[[104]](#footnote-104) or stretched out on the ground, in a position where beating the soles of the feet rather than the back would be practical.[[105]](#footnote-105) The 6th dynasty Controller of Works, Nekehbu, talking of his time running his elder brother’s estates, claims that he ‘did not beat somebody until he fell under my fingers’.[[106]](#footnote-106) In the New Kingdom literary Papyrus Lansing,[[107]](#footnote-107) the collecting scribe is accompanied by door-keepers, who carry SAbd-sticks, and by Nubians with the same bDn-sticks used as tool of interrogation in the tomb-robbery investigations: floggings follow for the farmer, and submerging in the well. The theme is a constant of Egyptian rural life, encapsulated best in the Roman period reference to Egyptian peasantry byAmmianus Marcellinus:[[108]](#footnote-108) “It is shameful among them if they cannot show whip marks on their bodies acquired from not paying their taxes. No torture has yet been invented harsh enough to get a hardened bandit from that region to give up his true name unwillingly.”

Military violence involves the de-humanisation of the foreigner. Flogging as civil norm[[109]](#footnote-109) belongs to a hierarchical attitude that treats peasants and workers in ways similar to animals, but both reflect a norm of violence as the tool and display of power. The physical interrogation of suspects and witnesses during the Ramesside tomb robbery processes were evidently severe, although they seem relatively unsophisticated: beatings and various forms of twisting seem to be the standard, although the exact form of the implements used are not clear:[[110]](#footnote-110)

Dd=f ir iw ky (r) iy mtw=f saHa(=i) iw=k (r) irit n=i sbAyt nbt bin

wHm smty=f m bA-DA-nA nA-DA-nA sp 2 sp 2 mi-ny-ny

Dd=f bpy=i ptr nty nb bpy=f hn

He said, “If somebody else will come and will accuse me, you will do any bad punishment to me!” He was interrogated again with the bA-DA-nA-stick and the nA-DA-nA-stick (repeatedly) and the mi-ny-ny. He said, “I did not see anybody!” He did not confess.

The interrogation is no diferent from that shown in the Qadesh reliefs:[[111]](#footnote-111)

pA iit iri.n pA HAptw n pr-aA a.w.s. iw ini=f HAptw 2 n pA xr n xtA m-bAH pr-aA ‘.w.s. iw.tw Hr qnqn=st r dit Dd=sn pA nty pA wr xsi n xtA im

The arrival by the scout of Pharaoh, l.p.h., having brought 2 scouts of the fallen-one of Hatti before Phraoh, l.p.h., and they were beaten to cause them to say where the vile fallen-one of Hatti was.

The use of a stake for flogging is well attested, but its use for other punishment or execution is less clear.[[112]](#footnote-112) Depictions of enemies tied to stakes are a theme in NK Underworld books, but not in other prisoner contexts of the pharaonic period.

**Conclusion**

Modern readings of the ideology of pharaonic Egypt, transmited through the products of its literate, essentially scribal, hierarchy, are typically one of a bureaucratic, governmental order. This is obviously partial. Historical Egypt does not seem to have suffered chronic local warfare, in the sense of serious military conflict between local magnates or relatively small, rival (city) states, which is not to suggest that the Egyptian countryside was a place of ordered security, or that violence did not play a significant part in inter-community (village) clashes.[[113]](#footnote-113) Our information about internal warfare in Egypt is limited, and relates to periods of significant disorder, and not to endemic features of life, although concern for local physical security may have been acute. Local hierarchy was not explicitly military. Military, or military-like titles do not then represent local (feudal-style) elites at the highest level, but the expanded household – attendants and followers – of king or local magnate. The military emphasis of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period still does not entirely overwhelm the ideology of hierarchy, but rather overlays it.

The discourse of Egyptian wisdom literature should not, then, be understood as the articulation of a concept of maat as an abstracted ethical norm, from which actual practice of individual behaviour should be derived, but rather as commentary on contemporary reality. It is not, then concerned with assertions of the rights of the individual, but more directly with hierarchical behaviour and the exercise of authority as the core social cement:[[114]](#footnote-114) the abuse of authority as destructive and the absence of authority as social disaster. Within that frame, violence should not be regarded as part of a set of ordered and systematic sanctioning for specific offences,[[115]](#footnote-115) but as the demonstration of authority, that is not entirely predicatable, not belonging to a gentility or regularity of process: the invocation of the bAw of Pharaoh.

Linguistically there is no distinction between native or foreign opposition, criminal or military, this world or cosmic. Those on whom the king exercises extreme violence are simply defined as sbi.[[116]](#footnote-116) Practically the exercise of that violence in civil contexts was mediated by negotiation. Military violence is presented, essentially, as addressing the external threat to Egyptian order, particularly from raiding and forcible immigration, and is mediated in any such way. The distinction is not one of ethics, but of circumstances. Kings and gods do not negotiate their power, but display it, violently in the face of opposition. My argument here is, then, that a high level of latent violence should be seen as structural to Egyptian society, and that the apparently peculiar ferocity of New Kingdom warfare does not represent anything aberrant in Egyptian display of power: it is not a form of peculiar unpleasantness reflecting specific foreign influences from the early New Kingdom, but inherent in the acting out and demonstration of power itself, military but also civil.

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1. As, for instance, Assmann 1995; Muhlestein 2008 and 2011; Müller-Wollermann 2009; and the focus on literary-ideological discussion in in Felber (ed.) 2005; in Franke’s phrase, 2005, 94: ‘Poesie des Massakers’, for which cf. Gnirs and Loprieno 2009; note also Graefe’s stress 2004, 54 on the reality at the root of the ideology; and Münch 2013 arguing on degree of reality, as a question that is itself problematic: emphasising the interrelationship of fiction-stereotype-propaganda and the victory of Pharaoh as a form of defining society-knowledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Yoyotte 1980-1981; cf. Eyre 2002, 154, n.6; Volokhine 2013. Contrast Abdalla 2005, arguing that the practice of cutting off hands ‘incresed greatly in relation to the increased number of foreigners serving in the Egyptian army’: brutality as a foreign introduction. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. Fuchs 2009, 72: ‘Wir dürfen aber festhalten, dass die Assyrer gar nicht so schlimm waren, wie sie sich selber dargestellt haben – sie waren höchst wahrscheinlich noch weit schlimmer.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. E.g., Deuteronomy 20: 10-18, contrasting this with the policy of annihilation when territory was to be cleared for Hebrew settlement, for which see Crouch 2009, 184-189; Zorn 2014, 87-88; and cf. Thucidides 5. 84-116 on the siege of Melos, where the killing of all the men and enslaving of women and children provided the focus for Thucidides’ primary discussion of the relationship between might, authority and ethics in warfare: cf. Grimsley and Rogers 2002, xv-xvi; Rahe 2002, 5, 21-22. For recent discussion of this asymmetry in Mesopotamain sources see Richardson 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Contrast Richardson 2011, on recent military historiography of Mesopotamia with the traditional concern of Lundh 2002 , about the meaningfulness of modern expectations of explicit, objective history for Egypt. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Oded 1992 collecting extensive Assyrian justifications for war; Bahrani 2008 and Crouch 2009, for attempt to give ancient Near Eastern practice of warfare an ethical dimension, in ways which have not been seriously attempted for the Egyptian material; similarly Nadali 2014 107-108 emphasising (visual) rhetoric in relation to civilian as opposed to military prisoners. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Medinet Habu I, pl. 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See, for instance, Simon 2016 discussing the reliefs of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Urk. IV, 137-141; Klug 2002, *Königliche Stelen*, 83-87 and pl. 8-9; Beylage 2002, I, 21-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For the term see Moers 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Gelb 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Tacitus, Agricola, end of chapter 30: *ubi solitudinem faciunt pacem appellant*. For scorched earth policy cf. Franke 2005, esp. 94-98; Meurer 2001, discussing the balance between formulaic repetition and reality. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Cf. Helck 1974 for a 4th Dynasty raid to xbA wAwAt, claiming to capture 17,000 Nubians. The theme runs consistently through Old Kingdom references to contacts with Nubia: e.g., Vachala 1991; Franke 2005, 89-91, for the mixture of punitive and slave-raiding; Hasel 1998, esp. 63-4, 248-253 for survey of the consequences of Egyptian conquest. See below n. 81 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Lines 9-11, Urk. IV, 1231, 7-19; Klug 2002, 193-208; Beylage 2002, 182-183. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Schultz 2002, Abb. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Urk*.* I, 103, 7 – 104, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Urk*.* I, 133, 9 – 134, 2; for the slaughter, in retribution, of the killers of an Egyptian expedition leader,Urk. I, 134, 13 – 135, 4. For the use of xbA, cf. Meurer 2001, 339-340. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Žába 1974, no. 74, p. 98-109. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Barbotin and Clère 1992, cols 30-32. The passage is interpreted differently by Redford 1987, followed by Muhelestein 2008. For the theme of execution of posterity cf. Herodotus III, 14-15, on Cambyses executions at the conquest of Memphis, focussed on the humiliation and destruction of the native elite. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. *Aeg. Les.* 84, 9-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *Urk. IV* 1659, 9-1660, 19; smA is here written only with the single sign, but would appear to provide a number of those massacred. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Piye Stela 85-86; Grimal 1981, 28-29 and 110, n. 306; cf. Frandsen 2016, 238. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Cf., for instance, the Calah texts of Assurnasirpal II (Grayson 1991, 191-223) repeatedly list the full range of massacres, mutilation, dismembering, heaping up or burning and display of the living and the dead. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Černý 1967, pl. V and VIII (following hand-copy of Breasted); KRI IV, 1-2, lines 4-9; Kitchen’s text varies from that of Černý in several places where reading is difficult. Youssef, 1964, tries to locate the Libyan focus of this text in the broader frame of international relations at the beginning of the reign; he also (p. 280) he compares Quran (chapter 20 verse 70), referring to the Pharaoh of the Exodus threatening the Jews: ‘…I will surely cutt (sic) off your hands and your feet on the opposite sides; and I will crucify you on the trunks of trees’. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Smith 1976, 124-130, pl. XXIX, LXXV, lines 11-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Rosetta Stone with variants, *Urk. I*I, 183, 6; Simpson 1996, 264-265; Pétigny 2010, 344-345, emphasising the symbolic importance of the public execution of deposed kings in the Late Period; and cf. Herodotus III, 14-15 on Cambyses enslaving girls and executing Egyptian boys of the highest class as punitive and warning measure following surrender of Memphis. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Nauri Decree 77-78 (KRI I, 56, 1-2) and 108 (KRI I, 57, 15). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. KRI I, 125, 14 – 126, 1 with additions KRI VII 428, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. pMayer A, 13, B1. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. pBM 10052, 11, 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. pAbbott, 5, 6-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Or Sri=f: not spelt out here. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. pBM 10052, 10, 12: xSb.tw di.tw tp xt. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. pBerlin P10496, vs. 4 = KRI V, 476-478; cf. also oCairo 25237, 10-13 and vs. 3-4 = KRI III, 529-530. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. The text seems to be written in a different hand from dm ‘pronounce’, so that translations typically begin a new sentence there: ‘the name of Pharaoh was pronounced’, although this leaves the previous phrase hanging: ‘in this <…>’. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. For comparable neo-Assyrian practice cf. Bahrani 2008, esp. 155-156, 219-223; Fuchs 2009; Jacobs 2009,127-146 for survey, including Abb. 3, Balawat gates of Shalmaneser III (BM 124656, Band X), showing defeated enemy impaled in front of town, with hands and feet cut off; Crouch 2009, 39-40 (Tiglath–Pilesar, impaling alive); otherwise display of corpses 54 (Sargon II); 122, 125 (Sennacherib); 141, 155 (Assurbanipal); Grayson 1991, 201 (Assurnasirpal II mutilating the living) and 214, 220 (live on stakes). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. pBM 10052, 11, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Nauri Decree, lines 46-47 (KRI I, 53, 6-7); cf. lines 49-50 (= KRI I, 53, 14-15); 53 (= KRI I, 55, 6-7); 70 (= KRI I, 55, 9-10); 82 (= KRI I, 56, 5-6); 92-93 (= KRI I, 57, 1); 117 (= KRI I, 58, 9-10). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Nauri Decree, lines 51-52 (KRI I, 54, 3-4) and 72-73 (KRI I, 55, 12-13). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. The words for both ‘mutilate’ and ‘nose’ are written ideographically, and so specific reading is not marked here. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Foucault 1977. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. pJud. Turin, 6, 1 = KRI 359, 14 - 360, 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. pBM 10052, 4, 9-10: Xdb is written ideographically, but reading ‘kill’ is more plausible than ‘mutilate’. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. pBM 10052, 11, 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. pBM 10052, 8, 19-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. RAD 76, 4-5 = pTurin 1887 (Turin Indictment Papyrus) 2, 3; the references to cutting off a hand (iw=f Sad Drt=f: RAD 74, 3 and 3 = pTurin 1887, 1, 2-3) seem to be in the context of sacred/temple animals not people. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. van den Boorn 1988, R 13, p.118-119 taking the view that the vizier is exercising the royal prerogative. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Willems 1990; Assmann 1992. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Diodorus, I.78.5. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Urk. IV, 1297, 1 - 1298, 4; Klug 2002, 286-292. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Urk. IV, 9, 3-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Grimm 1987; 1989, arguing that a ritual of destroying enemy by drowning is represented); cf. Muhlestein 2005, 174-175 for display of enemies in this way. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Cf. the depiction on the Narmer palette (Schultz 2002, Abb. 3) of a hawk controlling a head (attached to a land sign) by a rope through his nose. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Crouch 2009, 140, 152-153. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Vachala 1991, 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. E.g., Medinet Habu I, pl. 21-26, 37, 41, 48. Similarly Martin 1989, pl. 78-93, 99-105 mixes rows of male Nubian and Asiatic prisoners, unfettered, with others handcuffed in procession with females and children, and incidents of punches thrown and sticks used. Here prisoners for resettlement are evidently at issue. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. pHarris I, 77, 5-6; Medinet Habu I, 42, lower right; cf. Gnirs and Loprieno 2009, 495. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Urk. IV, 1304, 17-19: Klug 2002, 242-253; cf. Zayed 1985 for illustration, and Urk. IV, 1311, 8-12, referring also to the king personally killing with his minb, Klug 2002, 260-270. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Urk. IV, 1304, 12-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Urk. IV, 1307, 10-17; Klug 2002, 249. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Blankenberg-van Delden 1969, 16-17, 56-62, pl. X. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Caminos 1958, 48-51, lines 35-36; Jansen-Winkeln 2007, 164-165; Ritner 2009, 352-356. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Caminos 1958, 42-45, lines 31-32. Cf. Franke 2005, esp. 92-93, arguing the destruction of enemies as a sacral act, and the difficulty of separating the sacred from the profane in this respect. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Yoyotte 1980-1981, expanded by Volokhine 2013, 47, 51-52, 62 stressing, the relationship between massacres of prisoners, and judicial executions, contrasting ‘virtual’ vs. ‘real’ executions, with king as executioner, and concluding that the ‘mise à mort d’êtres humains lors des procedure ritualisées’, was not ‘sacrifice’ but part of the central Egyptian ritual process of ‘offering’: belonging to a complex discourse over the protection of Egypt and the world in the face of enemies, in which power was exalted by massacre of enemies. On burnt offerings and relation to destruction of enemies cf. Eyre 2003, 171-174, and Grimm 1988, on a ritual of burning of enemies in wsxt-court. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Eyre 2002: 162-164 for collection of material on slaughtering enemies, and the overlap between real, ritual and and propaganda. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Hall 1986 for collection of scenes of king smiting captive enemy. Schulman 1988 stresses the overlap between specific event and its reification for eternity through depiction. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. KRI V, 70, 8-11: both grammar and lexicon are difficult. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Vila 1963; Koenig 1990; Ritner 1993, 153-180. Also Fuscaldo, 2003, identifying as execration material a small pit, of the beginning of the 18th Dynasty, from Tell el Daba, with 3 male skulls (one showing blow to head) and bones from 9 fingers from 3 right hands, and a large pit with two human skeletons. Cf. also Muhlestein 2008, 194-196, and Gee 2010, 77-78.

    Ritner 1993, 168-70 emphasises the potential relationship between the Mirgissa material and depictions of torture and death in underworld books, concluding a direct connection with the ritual destructions in the Amduat ‘derived from genuine earthly ceremonies’. The relationship between the depictions of extreme violence in visions of the Underworld, and their relation to this-world behaviour, remains unexplored in real detail. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Winlock 1945; Vogel 2003. Cf. the early dynastic battle-field palette, Schultz 2002, Abb. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Shaw 2009 provides recent discussion, but conclusions of ritual killing that go beyond the data. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. And for later examples see Pétigny 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Galán 2002; Abdalla 2005 for a collections of examples; Volokhine 2013, 62-63 for an broader address to issues of mutilation and status of (separated) body-parts. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Bietak, Math, Müller and Jurman 2012, 31-34 for 2 pits with 14 cut-off right hands and two more pits with one hand each; and for another, early Dynasty 18 pit from Tell el Dab’a/’Ezbet Helmy with 3 right hands and 3 heads see Bietak, Dorner, Janosi 2001, 60 and 64 fig. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Eyre 2002, 92-97. In contrast, the display of severed heads is regular in Mesopotamian text and relief from all periods; cf. Bahrani 2008 with focus on decapitation; for illustrations of the archaeological finds of skulls, impalement reliefs, and flaying of prisoners for Sennacherib’s conquest of Lachish see Zorn 2014, 84, 98-100. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. 2002; cf. Volokhine 2013, 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Medinet Habu I, pl. 23; KRI V, 23, 12-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. KRI IV, 8 2-16 (Libyan War of Merenptah) distinguishes those killed iny nAy=sn Hnnyw m qrnt ‘whose phalli with foreskins were brought’, against nty bn n=w (or mn m-di=w) qrnt, whose hands seem to have been brought; cf. 7, 12-14: bringing donkey-loads of Hnyw qrnt n xAst rbw, ‘phalli, foreskinned, of land of Libu’, but hands of their allies. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Galán 2002; Abdalla 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Medinet Habu I, pl. 21-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. *Urk*. IV, 1304, 12-13, above n. 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Helck 1975 for talatat-block showing soldiers displaying hands on the ends of their spears. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. As argued by Abdalla 2005; cf. Crouch 2009, 39-40 for Tiglath-Pilesar specifically cutting off hands of living soldiers whom he had not impaled. A similar, and unresolved, argument underlies depictions of the removal of the foreleg of a calf, in the presence of its mother, in New Kingdom funerary scenes, cf. Eyre 2003 102-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Scott 2009, esp. 150-153 for the structural relationship between the need of the settled area to acquire population, and the periphery as location for such acquisition by slave-raiding. Cf. Gelb 1973, 79, 94 for early southern Mesopotamia; [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Franke 2005, 98-99; Kraemer and Liszka 2016, esp. 42-48, although their conclusions are speculative. Cf. Martin 1989, 97 [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Eyre 2012, 107-110. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. E.g., Assmann 1995, 76-77; Meurer 1998; Parkinson 2005, 14; Franke 2005, 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Foucault 1977, esp. 48, 50, and cf. Richardson 2016, esp. 51-53; Bahrani 2008, esp. 113-114. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. E.g. Loyalist Instruction §4, 1-2 in bAw=f aHA Hr=f iw Sad[=f] dd Sfyt[=f]

    His bAw is what fights for him, his ferocity which establishes his Sfyt

    Assmann 1995, 67 defines it as ‘Die Strafgewalt des Königs’, but this is too limited – it is a supernatural intervention, which is characteristically referred to in the physical absence of the king himself. In general see Borghouts 1982; Roeder 2009, esp. 86-87. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Quack 2010, 2-3, 6: Hm=f ‘his slave’ seems the most plausible of the proposed etymologies, parallel to reference to the royal person as ‘the king’s enemies’. Cf. specifically for (mis-)use of his name: Man for Son §6, 5 Sw m rn=f r imAx and §7, 7-8 nn is n dm rn=f nn sti mw n Sni sw. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Baines 1986, 45-47; 1987, 55-57 argues that the Early New Kingdom stela of Emheb provides an ideological emphasis on the king as killer and his soldiers as takers of captives: a statement of the king’s prerogative to take life. The presentation of violence as royal monopoly is consistent, from the depictions on the Narmer palette (cf. Richardson 2011, 17) through the narrative of king as sole destroyer of enemies in New Kingdom royal self-presentation: incidental actions of individuals are recorded only in their own autobiographies, providing a likely explanation for the narrower range of specific violence portrayed in the Egyptian material compared to the Assyrian (for which contrast Bahrani 2008, 29-40). [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Peet 1930, 26-27, with specific reference to pLeopold-Amherst 3, 19; 4, 10-1. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Capart, Gardiner and van der Walle 1936, 190; cf., e.g., Assmann 1995, 68: ‘Töten ist in Ägypten ein striktes Monopol des Staates’. The theme is regularly repeated as a given fact, but the argument comes from a highly ideological standpoint, and is not clearly rooted in practical realities of political force, murder (Hoch and Orel 1992), or feud and vendetta (Eyre 2016; and cf. Richardson 2016, 48 on Mesopotamian material). Frandsen 2016, 227-234 provides a recent, brief discussion of the issues and literature 227-234, and note Gee 2010, 77-78, n. 73 for references to destruction for crimes/in curses. For survey of capital and corporal punishment see Müller-Wollermann 2004, 195-208. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. E.g., Morschauser 1991, 120-122, 245; similarly Muhlestein 2008, 201-202; Altenmüller 2011, 4-5; Quack 2015: 30. Particularly striking is the example from the entrance of Tomb IV at Siut (Edel 1984, 99 and 120-127): ir swt sbi nb XAk-ib nb irt(y).f(y) pnayt m-xt nn sDm.n=f nn wn rn=f nn qrst=f m smt iw=f (or iwf) r pst Hna xbntyw, ‘any opponenet (sbi) and any malcontent (XAk-ib), who will do damage, after he has heard this, his name will not exist (nn wn rn=f ), he will have no burial in the necropolis, he will be cooked (or ‘meat for cooking’) together with the criminals’. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Frandsen 2016; cf. Hoch and Orel 1992, esp. 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Frandsen 2016: 227-234; cf., eg. Above n.19, Tod Inscription of Sesostris I, 30-32; above n.22, Piye stela 85-86; Žába 1974, 52, 79, 84 for a curse against people who destroy inscription: mwt=f n nmty nsw “He will die by the king’s butcher” (var. n Drt nmty, “by the hand of the butcher’). [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Merikare E 133-134. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Cf. Richardson 2016, 51-55 for this theme in Mesopotamian material. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Merikare 48; cf. Moers 2005, 255; as, in pWestcar, the king’s desire to see the head of a prisoner removed and restored, simply for entertainment. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Merikare 139-140. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Merikare 114-115; cf. Parkinson 2005, 16 and 14-17, 20-21; for violence as structural, cf. Eyre 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Willems 2008, 299-300 compares CT Spell 149, emphasising violent punishment of convicted desecrator and his family; *CT* II, 244-245 destruction of family of enemy as revenge. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Lines 15-16, Faulkner 1955. The context is that of vizier as representative of the king, unpartisan and with explicitly limited discretion in carrying out direct instructions. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. The theme runs through the Story of the Eloquent Peasant: flogged by the minor functionary who robs him, flogged by the High Steward in the middle of his petitioning, and expecting extreme violence at the end of his petitions: Peas. B1, 53-4; 217-218; B2, 116-118. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. E.g., James 1953, pl. IX, tomb of Khentika; in general cf. Vernus 2015, 310, n.3 and 315-316. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Newberry 1891, pl. 7. For early modern illustrations of both techniques, see Bruwier et al. 2014, 246-247 = pl. 20 and pl. 45 of J.-J. Rifaud’s Voyage en Égypte. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Urk. I, 217, 4 (n sp Hwi(=i) rmT nb im r xprt=f xr Xr Dbaw(=i)). [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. 5, 7 – 7, 6 (LEM 104-106). [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Ammianus Marcellinus 22.16.23 after Bryen 2013, 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. E.g. Satire on the Trades §2 and § 14 (pSallier 2, 3, 2and pSallier 2, 7, 3-4). and Admonitions, 4, 9 (pLeiden I 344). [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. pBM 10052, 8, 22-24 – the lines immediately preceding are quoted above on the expection of death as penalty. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. KRI II, 130, 1-9 (no. 8, with diagrams KRI II, 126-128). [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Beaux 1991. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Eyre 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Eyre 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. As, in effect Lorton 1977, Müller-Wollermann 2004, esp. 195-208, present the relevant corpus. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. E.g., Assmann 1995, 76-77. For the term, Muhlestein 2015, 1479-1481 [↑](#footnote-ref-116)